

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com**ScienceDirect**

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 183 (2015) 129 – 134

Procedia
Social and Behavioral SciencesInternational Workshop on Ideologies, Values and Political Behaviors
in Central and Eastern Europe**Mandala of Power****Cristiana Budac****West University of Timisoara, Bd. Parvan, No. 4, Timisoara, 300223, Romania***Abstract**

Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Hans Morgenthau are listed among the founding fathers of political realism in Western culture. I will try to show that an Indian author and his book – namely Kautilya's *Arthashastra* – offer as much insight and value as some of the best-known political writers. Although it seems aggressively ruthless and mean at times, *Arthashastra* accounts for a realist view on politics in ancient India. But as Heinrich Zimmer put it, ancient ideas had a strange modern touch to them. It is also the case of this Indian treaty and it will be my task to find its modern implications, starting with the theory of political circles (mandala), which is a genuine realist political model.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer review under the responsibility of the West University of Timisoara.

Keywords: Political realism; Kautilya; Arthashastra; mandala; Russia; Crimea

1. Arthashastra. A historical context

In an article written for *The New York Review of Books*, Indian economist Amartya Sen reflects upon the dominance of Western culture over our perceptions and the tendency to explain other cultures by subjecting them to the West. The West is seen as “having exclusive access to the values that lie at the foundation of rationality and reasoning, science and evidence, liberty and tolerance, and of course rights and justice” (Sen, 2000). Therefore, non-Western cultures must have different features, unrelated to the West. If only *Bhagavad-Gita* and Tantric texts elicit some interest India becomes mystic, religious, irrational, and exotic. The rest of Indian writings, including many in the field of mathematics, epistemology, natural science, linguistics, and economics remain largely unknown. As Sen puts it: “When identity is thus ‘defined by contrast’, divergence with the West becomes central.” There are many

* Tel.: +4-0740-660142

E-mail address: cristiana.budac@e-uvv.ro

Indian texts that match Western ones in substance and analysis, including economic science and political philosophy.

Had it been known to the Western world previously, the old Indian treaty of *Arthashastra* should have been listed among notable classical texts of political philosophy. But it was discovered only in 1905 by indologist R. Shamashastry in a heap of palm-leaf manuscripts at the Oriental Research Institute in Mysore, south India (Allan, Wolseley Haig & Dodwell, 1934:38). Four years later, Shamashastry transliterates the ancient text from Grantha, a script widely used by Tamil speakers in southern India, into Sanskrit. Later, in 1915, he publishes the first English translation of *Arthashastra*. The treaty is ascribed to Kautilya (370-283 B.C.), chancellor to King Chandragupta, the mighty founder of the Mauryan dynasty. Known to the Greeks as Sandracotta, King Chandragupta gained control over a large part of India during the fourth century B.C, from Bengal in the east to Afghanistan in the west and the Narmada River in the south. It is thought that part of this success may be ascribed to his chancellor.

Kautilya deserves a place among other remarkable figures in the history of political thought, such as Thomas Hobbes, Niccolò Machiavelli, Confucius or the Chinese Legalists. Similar to the Legalists, who outlined the ideological principles of the first Chinese dynasty, the Qin (221-207 B.C.), Kautilya stresses the importance of state power and the obedience that must be shown to power. He shares with Hobbes a pessimistic view about human nature and, like Machiavelli, is interested in educating the perfect statesman, someone who is powerful enough to keep and expand his authority. Yet unlike the works of Machiavelli or Confucius, *Arthashastra* does not tackle moral issues. Morality – the subject of another series of Indian treaties, the *Dharmashastras* (treaties about the laws of moral actions) – is personal.

Another indologist, Heinrich Zimmer, describes *Arthashastra* as the manual (*shastra*) dealing with the science of wealth (*artha*) (Zimmer, 1997: 33). Its 15 books cover a broad array of issues, from public administration and economy to foreign relations. Roger Boesche names Kautilya “the first great political realist” (Boesche, 2002), while Max Weber ironically describes *Il Principe* as “harmless” when compared to the Indian treaty where mean calculation becomes guideline for political actions. For instance, when talking about how important it is for a ruler to grant his subjects a decent life, it is not people’s well-being he has in mind, but kingdom prosperity. Content people have no reason to riot and everyone knows that riots can devastate a kingdom and ruin a king’s authority. Thus, an astute ruler will take care of his people while expanding power. It is known that in ancient India, a monarch could not count on anyone but the army and various professional spies (Zimmer, 1997: 80) to protect him, for sacred power belonged to the Brahmins (Kautilya pertained to this caste). Unlike Chinese emperors, Indian kings held no divine warrant, but depended on Sri-Lakshmi’s moods, the goddess of luck. As Zimmer said, it is from a sense of frailty that the skeptical, fatalistic and realistic political philosophy may have sprung from (Zimmer, 1997: 74). That is why strategic thinking was a must for Indian rulers.

Therefore the training of a future king implies discipline and self-control. “Self-control, which is the basis of knowledge and discipline, is acquired by giving up lust, anger, greed, conceit, arrogance, and foolhardiness. [...] A king who has no self-control and gives himself up to excessive indulgence in pleasures will soon perish, even if he is the ruler of all four corners of the world.” (1.6.4) (Kautilya, 1992: 144). If a king is urged to master his senses, to cultivate the intellect, to keep his eyes open through spies, to improve his learning, to promote the welfare of his people and to treat them justly, it is only because this will enable him to maintain rule and power for a long time. This advice is not given out of moral responsibility towards humans in general. It is practical advice, not ethical norms of conduct. People are loyal to a just king. If the king happens to be unjust, people will go over to the enemy and this way he loses his kingdom.

Kautilya helped Chandragupta unite the empire by defeating the corrupt Nanda kings. But an overthrown dynasty will seek revenge. Therefore, the entire Nanda family was assassinated. Yet there is a limit to political assassinations. When new territory is conquered from an enemy only the ruler has to be killed, not the people, because they can be turned into soldiers. Treaties with neighboring countries should be respected as long as this is convenient. “When the benefits accruing to kings under a treaty, irrespective as their status as the weaker, equal or stronger king, is fair to each one, peace by agreement shall be the preferred course; if the benefits are to be distributed unfairly, war is preferable.” (7.8.34) (Kautilya, 1992: 541). As Boesche considers, in *Arthashastra* diplomacy is a very subtle act of war.

2. Mandala or the theory of political circles

Indians ascribe pictorial characteristics to the universe. A *mandala* (Sanskrit for “circle”) projects the world geometrically, representing the universe in its essential form. The perpetual drama of cosmic disintegration and reintegration is expressed through these instruments of meditation. Kautilya uses the shape of a mandala to develop a political geometry that accounts for various political realities. In the seventh book of *Arthashastra* he describes international relations as a mandala system. Mandala or the theory of the political circles of neighbors is an abstract model used to describe foreign relations between various Indian states at war with each other. Heinrich Zimmer uses it to explain events in European history such as power configurations during World War II. This model implies a series of concentric rings or circles which stand for the enemies and allies of a given king. The king and his kingdom are located in the middle of the system. The first ring of states that surround him is made of enemies (neighbors, being closer, can attack easier). Beyond the first circle of enemies is the circle of political allies (thus confirming the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend). A third circle surrounds the second circle and makes for another circle of enemies etc. Outside this mandala remains only a king powerful enough to be neutral or various tribes presenting less danger than a state. A shrewd king knows how to use both his geographical positions and that of his allies and enemies successfully. He should never forget that his enemies might seek similar ends.

The whole theory is based upon the belief in a competitive and conflictive human nature. If humans are competitive, so are their political actions. War and peace are understood in terms of profit. International affairs take place on a battlefield where someone else’s ascension to power can be impeded through warfare. Kautilya, like Machiavelli later, thinks that a true leader must always look for ways to concentrate more power into his own hands. In order to do that he must give free course to his proclivities, not all of them appealing by moral standards. They are similar to what Machiavelli called *virtú*, that is, a “flexible disposition” of someone capable to change his mind and conduct when circumstances require it. To the Florentine thinker *virtú* is connected to power. Only when a prince grasps the importance of acquiring *virtú* will he know how to master politics. But even Machiavelli admits that there are two kinds of morality, Christian and pagan and, as Isaiah Berlin puts it, “the pagan world that Machiavelli prefers is built on recognition of the need for systematic guile and force by rulers, and he seems to think it natural and not at all exceptional or morally agonizing that they should employ these weapons wherever they are needed.” (Berlin, 1971). The ethics of a glorified ancient Rome will create a new republic of brave and fearless men willing to do whatever it takes to defend it. Christian values do not teach you what to do when confronted with corrupt or bullying rulers; they sometimes do not work for politics either. For Machiavelli, a harsh political reality requires an unusual moral code. Kautilya does not talk morality at all. To him, the world is a dangerous place where the most intelligent win the upper hand.

In International Relations realism shapes a conflict-based view of the international scene where actors – that is, states – are struggling to gain more power and security. By following one’s own goals there is little room left for the others. This is a reason why realism is often described as unethical. As Thucydides wrote in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, an independent state can survive only when it has enough power. Security and power are interrelated. One can only maintain security by gaining more power to keep the enemies at bay. The Greek historian sees the cause of the Peloponnesian War in an unstable distribution of power between Athens and Sparta. Yet, according to Korab-Karpowicz (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013), Thucydides also describes two different worldviews in the “Melian Dialogue”: the realist one (epitomized by the rational, overconfident Athenians who eventually lost the 27 year Peloponnesian wars), and the idealist one (namely the proud and pious Melians). Relying on power alone does not guarantee long-lasting success. Idealism alone does not help much either (the Melians also lost the war). It would be the task of Hans Morgenthau and other 20th century realist political thinkers to find a balance between state interests and ethical norms. In this respect, Kautilya is closer to Machiavelli than to Thucydides.

3. The law of the fish

“The progress of this world depends on the maintenance of order and the [proper functioning of] government.” (1.4.4) (Kautilya, 1992: 108), writes Kautilya in Book 1 of *Arthashastra*. Maintaining order is the main task for a

good king because this is how he can “preserve what he already has, acquire new possessions, augment his wealth and power, and share the benefits of improvement with those worthy of such gifts.”(1.4.3) (Kautilya, 1992:108).

The metaphor of “the law of the fish” depicts the world in the absence of such a king capable of upholding law and order. It is actually the law of the jungle the ancient chancellor refers to. We all live in a big pond where the big fish eat the little ones and must, in turn, be aware of the fisherman. As we have already seen the welfare of people is important for expanding power, therefore a king must know how to use punishment wisely against those who upset the social and political order. An unjust ruler will terrorize his subjects and ignite fury by handing to many punishments. A weak king will be incapable of using punishment, and tempts chaos.

4. Ancient Indian political theory today

Heinrich Zimmer believed that archaic teachings had a strange, modern touch to them. He used the mandala to explain the way in which England struggled to maintain a balance of power in Europe for more than 200 years seeking useful alliances with other countries. It allied itself with Holland, Portugal and Denmark against France at the beginning of the 18th century when Louis XIV proclaimed his own nephew king of Spain and threatened European monarchies. Later, when France made an alliance with Austria, Sweden and Saxony against Prussia, England supported Frederic the Great. Against Napoleon it allied itself with Portugal, Spain, Russia, Austria, Prussia and Holland (with the last three at Waterloo). But in the middle of the 19th century, England partnered with France against Russia in the Crimean War. At the beginning of the 20th century it endorsed Japan against Russia, and allied itself with Russia against Germany and Austria during the First World War.

The realist theory of International Relations underlines the competitive, conflictual side of international actors indeed. States are looking to maintain security and to gain more power even if this means war. England's attempt to keep a power balance illustrates this realism. Soon after World War I, idealists came with the idea of an international system of law and international organizations that would be able to prevent another major conflict. Assuming conflict to be residing in social and political configurations, thus not inherent to human nature, the idealists created the League of Nations. Yet it did not prevent the outburst of World War II. Optimism rapidly shifted back towards realism and in the late 70s, as the Cold War was coming near an end, there could be seen a revival of idealist thinking stressing the importance of international organizations and multinational corporations (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013). The European Union is also an idealistic project based on willingness of states to cooperate with each other in order to ensure European peace. Even if war seems improbable, it does not mean that every kind of conflict is resolved. There are still many European and national issues to be sorted out. And since the last financial crisis and the rise of nationalism it seems even harder to maintain an optimistic view in Europe.

Mandala outlines relationships of interested friendship and vile rivalry. Indian diplomacy teaches different techniques of approaching an enemy. Here is a list of techniques compiled by Heinrich Zimmer as one can find it in many Indian writings (*Arthashastra* does not list them as such but they can be identified in Kautilya's teachings easily):

- *Saman* (to negotiate, to reconcile peacefully)
- *Dada* (punishment, violence, restriction)
- *Dana* (gift, bribe)
- *Bheda* (to disunite, the Latin *divide et impera*)
- *Maya* (to deceive, to create an illusion)
- *Upeksha* (to ignore, to pretend not to see something)
- *Indrajala* (Indra's net, deceiving by spreading false information)

Some modern implications of these diplomatic techniques can be sorted out. *Saman* or peaceful reconciliation is an instrument deployed by the E.U. whenever a state of conflict occurs. Such idealism works only among a given number of states that subscribe to the same norms of conduct. It does not work when dealing with countries like Russia that has a totally different view on international affairs. If today most European countries accept the idealistic view in international relations, Russia remains realist, as Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin puts it in an interview for *Der Spiegel*. Referring to his country as “a fortress” where Orthodox churches, autocracy and national traditions form “a new national ideology”, Sorokin deplores the self-imposed isolation of Russia. Vladimir Putin likes to quote Czar Alexander III who strongly believed that his empire has only two allies, the army and the navy. This is a

defense strategy that sees Russia surrounded by enemies, underlines Sorokin. By enemies Russian authorities refer mainly to the United States of America. Some Russian officials use the old Soviet rhetoric, as those army generals do when bragging on TV channels that “Russian missiles are ahead of the latest American models by three five-year plans”. It is this bellicose mentality of the Soviet era Sorokin calls a huge step backward. But president Putin seems to mourn the lost world in a speech held on March 18 2014, the day Crimea was taken over by Russia: “Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades. After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability. Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle ‘If you are not with us, you are against us.’ To make this aggression look legitimate, they force the necessary resolutions from international organizations, and if for some reason this does not work, they simply ignore the UN Security Council and the UN overall.” Ironically, the same can be said about Russia.

Conflict and war, if needed, are instruments to acquire and maintain power or political influence. Punishment and violence (*dada*) are deployed throughout Crimea as Russian troops stormed over Ukrainian military bases in March 2014. A gas debt of almost 2 billion dollars is used by Russia to put pressure on a feeble Ukrainian economy. On the other hand, U.S and E.U hand out mild sanctions against some of the top influential Russian oligarchs. “Putin’s Russia had spoken of Ukraine disdainfully—it was a backwater, dull and provincial. Suddenly, Ukraine became incredibly fashionable and modern, while enormous Russia seemed hopelessly backward, cumbersome, and provincial”, writes Sorokin in an essay for *The New York Review of Books* called “Russia is Pregnant with Ukraine”. Playing the “capricious, unpredictable Queen of Spades”, as Sorokin labels him, Putin prepares the invasion of Ukraine, a procedure “performed by separatists, saboteurs, ‘soldiers of fortune,’ adventurers, and provocateurs.” But he insists on calling it a democratic cry of the people in Crimea: “the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities. Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress.” Russia had to intrude in order to protect Russians living there. There are large numbers of ethnic Russians living also in Kazakhstan, Trans-Dniester, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus (although, except for Northern Kazakhstan, they do not form the majority). Should these countries be afraid of a Russian invasion too? Latvia and Estonia are E.U. members, so there is little danger there. The E.U. tried to win some of these republics over (Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Ukraine), but Belarus and Armenia joined the Russian customs union instead. And Moscow does not use soft methods when it comes to protecting its own interests in the region: cutting gas supplies to Ukraine in winter, banning imports from Ukrainian firms, banning Moldavian wine imports (a key export sector for Moldova), backing separatists in Trans-Dniester, and now the take-over of Crimea. In the middle of the speech Putin became straightforward: “They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions. Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard. You must always remember this.” If it is pushed to the limit, Russia will respond as it sees fit. After remembering historical events that bond his country to Ukraine, after alluding to friendship and human rights, after so much concern for the 96 percent who voted in favor of reuniting with Russia, the president comes to a very simple, realistic truth: leave us to do as we please, or be prepared for the consequences.

European diplomats think that Kremlin’s goal after the annexation of Crimea is to „destabilize Ukraine and to sabotage its pro-western government.”(Harding, 2014). This is the very old technique of *divide et impera* (*bheda*). As for *maya* and *Indrajala*, both were used by president Putin to justify the annexation of Crimea and to convince the Russian majority in the peninsula that a better future awaits them as members of the Federation. Many residents

of Crimea were led to believe that terrorists took over Kiev and that the legitimate president, Yanukovych, was forced to leave. The Russians were also manipulated by television. It was a lot of talk about Ukrainian liberal-fascists and America using Ukrainian liberal-fascists to occupy Ukraine. Putin's speech referred to a "fifth column" and "national traitors". "Those who stood behind the latest events in Ukraine had a different agenda: they were preparing yet another government takeover; they wanted to seize power and would stop short of nothing. They resorted to terror, murder and riots. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day" says Putin in his address.

It is not clear if Russia will continue with its expansionism. Acquiring new territories is a costly business nowadays and president Putin seems to know it: "I also want to address the people of Ukraine. (...) I want you to hear me, my dear friends. Do not believe those who want you to fear Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea. We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do not need that." Russia is trying to protect itself with a circle of countries that form a barrier along its borders and facilitate access to strategic zones (such as Crimea to the Black Sea). NATO is a major concern: "Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia." Russia does not want the military alliance in its "backyard" so it uses neighboring countries or regions in order to gain and secure more power (the harbor of Sevastopol is a key factor in shipping weapons – a large sector of Russian industry – to Middle East, especially Syria). Some political analysts say it is not all about NATO getting close, but about the Europeanization of Ukraine: "The current crisis is not about Ukraine joining NATO, a move for which there is no great public demand. Rather it is about the possibility that Ukraine would reject integration into the Eurasian Union, which is key to Putin's fantasies of rebuilding a Russian Empire. He could not accept the possibility of a successful, Europeanized Ukraine, prosperous and governed by the rule of law, where a 'Ukraine virus' might be bred that would ultimately 'infect' Russia." (Braun, 2014)

Russia is building a mandala of power by bribing, punishing, and deceiving. It holds on to a realist political model while the E.U. offers liberal, diplomatic counterstrikes of peaceful negotiation. Even an array of sanctions imposed by the EU and US are targeting only some key Russian sectors (banks, EU-Russia military deals, but not gas industry). In an article written for *World Affairs Journal*, professor Aurel Braun indicated that "soft power alone has not deterred Russia, and neither have the 'soft' sanctions it has imposed. This is why the West has to move to sanctions that will be a form of hard power, even though they will not be cost free."

Engaging in an open conflict with Moscow will definitely not put an end to turmoil. However, there seems to be no solution to Thucydides' old dilemma – namely the irreconcilable dispute between liberal, idealist political views and the realist ones.

References

- Allan, J., Wolseley Haig, T., Dodwell, H.H. (1934). *The Cambridge Shorter History of India*. London: Cambridge University Press (<http://www.questia.com/read/88816404/the-cambridge-shorter-history-of-india>).
- Boesche, R. (2002). *The First Great Political Realist: Kautilya and His Arthashastra*. Maryland: Lexington Books
- Braun, Aurel (2014). „Tougher Sanctions Now: Putin's Delusional Quest for Empire", *World Affairs Journal* (July/August 2014)
- Harding, L. (2014), "Russia ready to annex Moldova region, Nato commander claims", *The Guardian* (March 23, 2014) (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/23/russia-ukraine-annex-moldova-trans-dniester-nato>)
- Kautilya (1992). *The Arthashastra*, edited, rearranged, translated and introduced by L.N. Rangarajan, Penguin Books India
- Korab-Karpowicz, W. J. (2013). "Political Realism in International Relations", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/realism-intl-relations/>.
- Sen, A. (2000). "East and West: The Reach of Reason", *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 47, no. 12 (July 20, 2000).
- Sorokin, Vladimir (2007). "Russia Is Slipping Back into an Authoritarian Empire", *Der Spiegel* (February 02, 2007) (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-author-vladimir-sorokin-russia-is-slipping-back-into-an-authoritarian-empire-a-463860.html>)
- Zimmer, H. (1997). *Filozofite Indiei*, translated by Sorin Mărculescu, București: Humanitas
- For Putin's speech on Crimea : <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6889>